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SUBJECT Interview With Mother of Robert Clayton Ames

DIANE SAWYER: It is rare for the CIA to identify any of its people, but one of the Americans killed in the Beirut Embassy explosion has been officially identified as 49-year-old Robert Clayton Ames of Philadelphia, director of the CIA's Office of Analysis for the Near East and South Asia.

Yesterday, Charles Thomas of our Philadelphia station, WCAU-TV, spoke with Mr. Ames' mother, Heller Ames.

CHARLES THOMAS: Had he ever told you what he was doing?

HELLER AMES: Not really. No. And I used to be very embarrassed because all my neighbors and relatives would say, "Well, what's Bob really doing?" And I finally pinned him down. I said, "Bob, you'll have to give me some kind of an answer so that I can let people know that I'm not exactly ignorant of what you're doing."

So he said, "Well, mother, the best thing -- the best answer you can give is that I am a -- a chief expert on Middle East affairs."

THOMAS: Did you know -- you knew that he was with the Central Intelligence Agency?

AMES: Oh, yes, I knew that. That's what he started out in. That's what he started out in. And, of course, he told me that, and I was told never to repeat that to anybody,

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and I never did all the while he was there. But then, when the State Department wanted him in their section then, of course, that was the end of that.

THOMAS: Knowing the Middle East is a violent place -- knowing the CIA, it has to make a mother worry.

AMES: Well, I did, but I didn't realize half of what was going on because he kept me away from all that. You know, he'd come and go, and he would just never let me know. It wasn't until he was completely out of there that he told me. He told me one time when he was visiting that he had to go to Israel, and he had been in, I think, Saudi Arabia. And when he wanted to enter Israel, they arrested him, and he was put in jail, and they would not believe that he was -- of course when he was in the CIA....

[Whispers]: I don't know whether I'm supposed to be talking like this.

When he was in the CIA, he was never there as a --actually as an undercover agent. He was there as a student or a businessman, and this is -- this was his cover. And when he went into Israel, he showed them all his credentials, but they didn't believe him.

THOMAS: In other words, you were the mother of a spy.

AMES: [Whispers] Yes.

THOMAS: News came that he had been involved in an explosion.

AMES: Yes. Well, that's what my daughter-in-law said. Something was developing over there that needed him. He was not really supposed to be going over there right now. He had just come home from Paris on some kind of business, or whatever, and she said there was something going on over there between the PLO and Israelis and they needed him over there, and that is the way it went. She said he had -- he had set up this meeting himself, and she said he had planned to go to Israel first and then to Beirut. And then she said all of a sudden at the last minute he changed his mind. He said, "When I -- when I go to Beirut, I know where I'm going. I know the people at the Embassy. They're all friends of mine." "But," he said, "when I go into Israel, I'm never sure what I'm going to meet," because he knew that he'd have trouble with Menachem Begin, and he was trying to win him over. So, he decided to go to the place where he was going to be happiest first and leave

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the hard part to the end, and if he had only done what he had set out to do he would be alive today.

SAWYER: That was Heller Ames.